

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, January 24, 2007

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January 24, 2007

Muslim man claims religious conspiracy

Dad sues Department of Human Services, says ex-wife was told to keep teen daughter from him.

Gregg Krupa / The Detroit News

DEARBORN -- A Muslim man says the state Department of Human Services and a local church are conspiring as part of a custody battle to prohibit his daughter from practicing Islam and visiting him.

Abraham Ben-Abbad, 38, of Dearborn alleges in a suit filed Monday in U.S. District Court that the Department of Human Services and a caseworker, William McDonald, advised Ben-Abbad's former wife that she need not allow their daughter, Hend Almanasir, 13, to visit her father, including during Ramadan and on other religious holidays, despite court orders mandating the visitation.

Arab-American and Muslim organizations in Metro Detroit, which are monitoring the case closely, say the state should not interfere in a custody battle with the intent of participating in a decision about what religion a child should pursue.

"To me, my kids are the most important things in my life," Ben-Abbad said, breaking into tears at a news conference Tuesday. "Especially, Hend; she is the oldest. She grew up, and I cared for her most of the time."

McDonald and the state also allowed a local church, the Dearborn Assembly of God, on Tireman, to participate in meetings to plan his daughter's future, according to Ben-Abbad, his lawyer, Shereef Akeel of Birmingham, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

The lawsuit alleges that the pastor of the church, Trey Hancock, offers an outreach program for American women married to Muslim men, and that his ministry is intent on converting Muslims to Christianity. The purpose of involving the church in planning for his daughter's future is to steer her away from Islam, the faith in which she was raised, Ben-Abbad said and the suit alleges.

Hancock and officials of the church were not available to comment. When a reporter called the church and identified himself, a man who answered the phone hung up.

Officials at the state Department of Human Services say they are unaware of the suit and the allegations.

"However, if it is justified, we would consider an investigation," said Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the department. "Any issue of religious preference is taken seriously by the department."

While court orders permitting Ben-Abbad's visitation rights remain in place and were recently reaffirmed by Judge Christopher Dingell of the Wayne County Circuit Court, McDonald and the department have defied the orders, according to Ben-Abbad, his lawyer and the civil rights groups.

Dingell cited the state's defiance in an Oct. 31 order, in which the judge said he was nonetheless "reluctant to use contempt powers" to cite the state.

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Detroit Free Press
Wayne County news briefs

January 24, 2007

DEARBORN: Man sues agency on claim of bias

A Dearborn Heights man who claims that a state agency is denying his daughter her Islamic heritage filed a lawsuit in federal court Monday.

Abraham Ben-Abbad filed the suit in U.S. District Court in Detroit, saying the Department of Human Services violated his religious rights as a parent. His daughter, 13, was raised as a Muslim, he said, but the state is now preventing her from observing Muslim holidays and from visiting him. A department spokeswoman said it would be premature to comment.

The suit was announced Tuesday at the Dearborn office of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, which says this case reflects anti-Arab bias.

The man said he and the girl's mother divorced in 1997 and have shared custody until last August.



Make the best of a second chance

January 24, 2007

BY ROCHELLE RILEY

FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

A week has passed since Nathaniel Abraham walked out of state custody, free for the first time since entering the system at 11. And the poor kid got skewered, for his taste in clothes, for his lack of humility and, quite frankly, for still being a kid.

To celebrate his freedom, Nathaniel, who a decade ago became the youngest person convicted of murder in the United States, strutted out of incarceration wearing a flamboyant white suit, pink shoes, a rabbit coat and a fedora. The storm of questions, second-guessing and outrage he started became a blizzard. Within 48 hours, he was the talk of the town.

Even I couldn't resist, wondering why his handlers didn't tell him that that suit went out of style when he was 11, that those sounds he was hearing were potential employers closing their doors, and ... well, you get the picture.

But then I went to church Sunday, where a wiser, older gentleman asked if I could please offer the kid a little consideration.

I considered.

And while I still hated the pimp suit, I couldn't help but notice how easy it was for us to jump Nathaniel rather than help him. He has spent half his life as a criminal on display. Now he has a chance to be something else. Remember, this is a kid who wasn't making good judgments when he was 11 and is on his own for the first time in his life.

What happens now will make him or break him. I don't know whether he'll appreciate some advice, but here's hope anyway.

Nathaniel:

The uproar over your clothes last week came from people who saw a murderer get a second chance and appear ungrateful for it.

When you kill someone, there is nothing more serious. You and your victim almost got the same punishment -- missing things. You missed high school graduation and homecoming dances and football games and -- man, you missed Spiderman! But your victim suffered more, and we must always remember Ronnie Greene Jr. He missed his wedding day and his 25th wedding anniversary and walking his daughter down the aisle.

His losses can't be replaced by new opportunities. He gets no second chance. So when you do damage like that, and you get one, you can't come out of custody dressed like a gangster.

People will talk. And they did. No one can tell you how to dress. But life shows you how to act. And if you want to be more than a criminal, you must understand that you're not 11 anymore.

No one wants to steal your joy. But don't let anybody steal your purpose either. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to rise above the judgments and learn how to be a 21-year-old you. Learn to be a man while recapturing some of your youth.

Please find someone to help guide you down that narrow path lined with brick-throwers on one side and apologists on the other. Find someone who will tell you when you're making a mistake.

That's all I can offer, except, son, don't ever wear those shoes again.



Clothes show how the corrections system fails

January 24, 2007

Nathaniel Abraham's choice of dress was his and his alone ("Judging a free man by his hookup; Abraham's outfit raises eyebrows," Jan. 19). Abraham did an excellent job of displaying for all to see the failure of Michigan's attempt to reform and rehabilitate him.

Abraham is the product of Michigan's failure to do what is right, and now he has been let loose with less than acceptable rehabilitation. He was crammed into a system unable to handle the large volume of cases and perpetually short of funds, with a lack of concern from the people who are directly responsible for his care.

I feel sorry for those who are still in the criminal system. They are being cheated and shortchanged the help the courts ordered for them to receive.

William L. Scott

Redford

Don't blame Abraham

I, too, was disappointed in Nathaniel Abraham's appearance. The public should know that you can't blame Abraham. Why did no one of authority, like family, tell him that the suit was inappropriate for court and out of season fashionably?

How can we expect him to know the right thing, coming from where he has been? That he starts off like that certainly implies that he's in for an uphill struggle in his life. He's obviously still a little boy with man-size consequences now. Who will look out for Abraham? Who will stop him from being too loud and proud? Were there any lessons in humility?

Kevin L. Rakestraw

Detroit

No remorse

He has been freed and is no longer under the State of Michigan's supervision. He showed no remorse.

There was some concern about his learning "social skills" while in custody, how he would adapt when he got released. He already learned the "social skills" of young adults in today's world -- how to kill someone without feeling remorse.

Paul Amici

Harbor Beach

The wrong statement

I hope I am wrong, but the dress of Nathaniel Abraham leaving court does make a statement: "I'll Be Back."

Gerald Krajewski

Dearborn

Dressed to shine

Having spent a significant part of his young life clothed in either orange or stripes, I see

nothing inappropriate in the attire Nathaniel Abraham selected for his big day in court. Hopefully, the rest of his life will sparkle as much as his shoes.

Pete Laitinen

Westland

A model judge

Thank you for making so many others aware of what we in the legal community have known for years ("Judge saw boy worth saving," Jan. 19). Oakland County Family Court Judge Eugene Moore sets the standard for how we, as a civilized society, should treat our children.

Many years ago, I was a student of Moore's at the Detroit College of Law. He was that remarkable combination of notable intellect and humanity. He inspired me then. He inspires me now.

Moore's impact on the law, his students and the young lives of those who have come into his court cannot be measured. It is priceless. The ideal is that justice should be meted out with wisdom and tempered by mercy. All jurists should aspire to that standard. Moore meets it.

Christine Derdarian

Bloomfield Hills

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Robinson Twp. teen arraigned on murder charge

BY ALAN INGRAM

aingram@grandhaventribune.com

HOLLAND — A 17-year-old Robinson Township teen was arraigned by video Monday afternoon in Holland's 58th District Court on open murder and felony firearm charges.



Antonio Liceaga, who attends West Ottawa High School, is accused of killing 14-year-old Felipe Van. He faces up to life in prison if convicted of the crimes. District Judge Susan Jonas denied his bond.

He will have a preliminary examination within the next 14 days.

Miguel Liceaga, a spokesperson for the family and Antonio's uncle, read a statement after the arraignment.

"First and foremost, we would like to extend our condolences to the Van family," he read. "... We are putting our trust in the court system to resolve this matter truthfully.

"The boys that were involved were more than just acquaintances," Miguel Liceaga said. "They were best friends."

He added that there is open communication between his family and Van's, who was killed Saturday.

The shooting happened at 675 Hayes St. in Holland Township on Saturday at about 1:45 p.m., said Ottawa County Sheriff's Department Lt. Mark Bennett.

When police arrived, they discovered 14-year-old Van dead from an apparent gunshot wound, Bennett said. Police then found another person who was in the residence when the shooting happened.

After a Sunday morning meeting with officials from the Ottawa County Prosecutor's Office, a 17-year-old was held at the Ottawa County Jail on the two charges, Bennett said.

Police were also able to recover a handgun that they believe was used in the crime, Bennett said.

Antonio Liceaga has lived with his mother, step-father and one sibling in Robinson Township for about the last 10 years, according to court documents.

Both boys had brushes with the juvenile justice system.

Antonio Liceaga had several prior contacts with juvenile authorities, though none resulted in convictions, said Kevin Bowling, circuit court administrator.

"Felipe wasn't an angel, but he was working at (improving his behavior) and he was doing better," Bowling said.

After several minor offenses and time in the Juvenile Justice Institute alternative school, Van was back at West Ottawa High School and back on the right track, family and officials said.

An autopsy performed Monday by Ottawa County Medical Examiner David Start at Spectrum Health Blodgett Hospital determined Van's cause of death was from a gunshot wound, Bennett said.

The Holland Sentinel contributed to this story.

Posted: 1-24-2007

Special meeting set in wake of gun incident

By JOE BOOMGAARD

Daily News Staff Writer

A 14-year-old boy remains in an Ottawa County juvenile detention facility today facing charges he carried a concealed weapon and that he carried the weapon with the intent to harm three teachers at O.J. DeJonge Junior High School.

Ludington Area Schools Superintendent Cal DeKuiper said he knew the boy had intended targets Monday.

"It's disturbing to say the least," DeKuiper said.

The Ludington school board will decide what disciplinary action to take against the student at a 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 31 special meeting, DeKuiper said. The board can rule to expel the student from the district.

"What we're doing now is trying to move fast enough to be legal but slow enough to make sure we're following the correct due process," DeKuiper said, noting this type of situation fortunately is not something he deals with very often.

The student is currently on indefinite suspension pending the board's action.

DeKuiper said the teachers named by the boy as intended targets were informed of the situation. He added the teachers were doing well considering the circumstances.

"You sit back and take one more sigh of relief," DeKuiper said.

The police have interviewed the three teachers. DeKuiper said he didn't know if the three individuals taught the boy currently or in the past. The teachers and the entire staff were offered counseling following last week's incident.

"We're fortunate enough to have counselors on staff and close friends in the business. That all helps," DeKuiper said.

The revolver was found in the student's backpack which he had with him during a meeting with the school's Assistant Principal Mike Winczewski about an unrelated matter. Students alerted a teacher about weapon, and that teacher pulled Winczewski out of the meeting with the student and informed him of the rumor.

Winczewski finished the meeting and then addressed the rumor with the student,

searching his backpack and finding the revolver.

Ludington Police Chief Mark Barnett said his department is “looking to see where any other parts of investigation lead.” Barnett said he doesn’t know what the boy’s motives were.

“With something that involves a fair number of people — from police department perspective, although the report was forwarded to the prosecutor’s office, it’s important for us to be open to information that comes in,” Barnett said.

The incident at O.J. DeJonge Junior High School was one of four recent weapons-related cases involving area schools.

On Dec. 22, a Pentwater student was suspended after a knife fell out of his pocket while he was on a school bus. The student was suspended but not expelled after the school board determined he didn’t bring the knife to hurt anybody.

A ninth-grade boy at Mason County Central was suspended after homemade chemical device exploded in his backpack inside the school Jan. 11. The Mason County Sheriff’s Office took up the case Monday, and detectives are continuing to investigate the incident, according to Sheriff Laude Hartrum.

A day later on Jan. 12, a 16-year-old boy was found with a 3.5-inch blade folding knife at Free Soil High School. The case was investigated by the Mason County Sheriff’s Office and charges were pending in juvenile court.

“Obviously, (these incidents) make all of us sit back and take a look,” DeKuiper said. “With so many happening so quickly, we’re hoping it’s just an anomaly.

“All we’ve done all the way through was to use this as an opportunity to try to reinforce to kids to pay attention and to parents to pay attention.”

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Man admits guilt in daughter's near-fatal mauling

NEWBERRY, Mich. -- A man has pleaded guilty to child abuse after sleeping through the near-fatal mauling of his 3-year-old daughter, who wandered into a back yard, got tangled in a Rottweiler's chain and was bitten and scratched for an hour.

The child, Iris Wass, is recovering from wounds that covered nearly all her body. She was treated at the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor, where dirt had to be vacuumed from her lungs, relatives and police said.

Corey Thomas Wass, 27, of Newberry, waived his right to a preliminary hearing Monday in Luce County District Court. Shortly afterward, he pleaded guilty in circuit court to second-degree child abuse.

Sentencing was scheduled for March 20 and could include prison time ranging from four months to four years.

"He feels that there's nothing they can do to him to make him feel worse than he already does," Corey Wass' mother, Sandra Wass, told The Mining Journal of Marquette.

Amber Mayor, the child's mother, said she wanted Corey Wass' parental rights terminated.

"I don't care what he does or where he is, as long as he can't see her," said Mayor, 20. She said she and Wass had never married and their relationship ended about a year ago.

Iris was dropped off at the home of Sandra Wass on Jan. 4 for a visit with her father, investigators said.

Corey Wass said in court Monday he had consumed intoxicants or medication earlier and fell asleep while Iris was there. His mother told the newspaper that Wass and his daughter were watching cartoons when he dozed off.

"To me, it was a tragic accident," Sandra Wass said. "It could happen to anyone who lays down and takes a nap with their toddler."

Prosecutor Peter Tazelaar said the charge was based on the child's injuries and her father's failure to protect her.

Iris wandered through two doors to the yard, where three dogs were chained.

She apparently got tangled in the chain holding a 120-pound female Rottweiler. Sheriff Kevin Erickson said the dog may have panicked and started scratching and biting the girl.

A neighbor finally noticed what was happening and rescued Iris. By then, her clothes had been scratched off and she had suffered 11 bites, two of which went to the bone. She was rushed to a hospital in critical condition, her heart rate and blood pressure fluctuating wildly and body temperature dangerously low.

Iris spent 15 days with a feeding tube and underwent three operations to remove infected skin.

She was released from the hospital in Ann Arbor last Friday and returned home to Newberry, where relatives say she faces a long recovery.

"She's doing well today, she's playing," Mayor said Monday. "She's just a little miracle baby, tough as nails."

The dog was ordered euthanized.

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Ordeal tearing girl's family apart



Amber Mayor, right, the mother of 3-year-old Iris Wass, and her friend, Tami Rourke, were among family members and friends who talked with reporters after court hearings Monday for defendant Corey Wass. (Journal photo by John Pepin)

By JOHN PEPIN, Journal Munising Bureau

NEWBERRY — The recent dog mauling of a young Newberry girl has torn the child's family apart, with both sides expressing their pain following a court appearance by the girl's father.

Amber Mayor, 20, the mother of 3-year-old Iris Wass, said she wants the parental rights of the girl's father, Corey Wass, terminated.

"I don't care what he does or where he is, as long as he can't see her," Mayor said. "I would like to see his rights given up."

Corey Wass, 27, of Newberry pleaded guilty Monday to second-degree child abuse and will be sentenced March 20 in Luce County Circuit Court for the four-year felony

While Wass slept on Jan. 4, his daughter was able to get outside where she became entangled in the chain of a pet Rottweiler dog. The dog bit, scratched and critically injured the girl in an incident that lasted about an hour, according to police.

After just more than two weeks of treatment — including 15 days on a feeding tube and the use of a ventilator — Iris Wass returned home Friday to her mother.

"She's doing well today, she's playing," Mayor said Monday. "She's just a little miracle baby, tough as nails."

Sandra Wass, Corey's mother, said her son has a deep relationship with both of his daughters. He also has a 7-year-old girl with another woman.

"His girls are his world," Sandra Wass said. "If they keep Iris away from Corey, they're hurting Iris more than anything."

Sandra Wass said her son was on his hands and knees crying in the chapel at Helen Newberry Joy Hospital after his daughter was brought there after the incident.

"Him and I cried for four days straight," Sandra Wass said.

Sandra and Corey Wass went to Ann Arbor where Iris was hospitalized in a burn unit. Corey was arrested there by campus police and Sandra Wass said she waited for a week with only one

opportunity to see her granddaughter.

Mayor talked with reporters after a court hearing Monday. She described her daughter as a little girl who likes to play, color, watch cartoons and eat junk food.

Both Mayor and her friend Tami Rourke said they want people to know how serious the incident was. Some family members are concerned the critical nature of the situation is being downplayed.

"This is a severe, severe, life-threatening incident," Rourke said.

The young girl was at Helen Newberry Joy Hospital Monday having wound dressings changed, while her mother was at the courthouse.

Mayor said Iris is taking "seven bottles of medication" for pain and will likely have to have skin grafts on her legs before making a full recovery. Her psychological condition is still being determined.

"At the hospital, she was starting to understand what happened," Mayor said.

Mayor said she and Corey Wass were together four years and were never married before breaking up a year ago.

"He was just a bum, but she (Iris) loves him just like any dad," Mayor said.

Though no incidents had occurred previously, Mayor said she always feared the interaction between her daughter and four Rottweiler dogs kept at the home of Corey's mother.

The house is where Iris would visit her father and where the attack by the 120-pound female Rottweiler named Simone took place.

"I always said, 'Watch her around those dogs,'" Mayor said.

Steve Bettis, Iris' maternal grandfather, said he wants the three dogs that were outside during the incident destroyed.

"The neighbor that found her (Iris) said they were all there," Bettis said. "They were all involved and they were all present. They were trying to bury her."

The court ordered Simone euthanized Monday.

Sandra Wass said she gave the remaining three dogs to other people. She would not want Iris to see another dog at the home if she came to visit.

Sandra said she thinks dirt got into Iris' lungs from the dog dragging her around with the chain. She doesn't think the dogs were burying Iris, nor was the Rottweiler attacking the 30-pound girl.

"If it had been an attack, that baby would've been gone and that's all there is to it," she said. "I think she was playing and got caught in the chain."

Sandra Wass said she thinks the charge against her son should have been neglect, rather than child abuse because he wouldn't do anything to intentionally hurt his children.

According to her, Corey had come home early from his housekeeping job at the Comfort Inn, feeling ill. He laid down on the bed with Iris to watch cartoons and both took a nap.

"To me, it was a tragic accident," Sandra said. "It could happen to anyone who lays down and takes a nap with their toddler."

Sandra said her homeowners insurance will pay the medical bills and she is setting up a trust fund for Iris.

For her and other family members on Corey's side, Sandra said not being able to see Iris or know how she's doing has been very painful. They hope Mayor's anger will temper over time.

"The way we all feel is we are just devastated. All our thoughts and prayers are with Iris. We just want her to get better," Sandra Wass said. "We're all hurting for that baby."



01/23/2007

Child abuse hearings postponed

A review hearing has been scheduled for Tuesday, Feb. 13 for Jessica Ann Lake, an 18-year-old Fenton Township resident charged with first-degree child abuse. She was scheduled to have a pre-trial on Tuesday, however, it was postponed to allow additional time for her psychological evaluation.

Lake's co-defendant, Christopher Rowand, 22, was charged with the same crime and he is scheduled to have a pre-trial on Feb. 13.

The two were arrested in November after they took Lake's young daughter to the hospital for treatment of seizures and hospital staff observed numerous injuries on her body. Lake and Rowand remain lodged at the Genesee County Jail.

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Health clinic wins reprieve

Wednesday, January 24, 2007

By Susan J. Demas

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St. Luke's Clinic will be able to keep its doors open for the next year.

The center -- which has served more than 6,000 low-income patients since 2003 -- won a reprieve with \$18,000 in donations this month from local groups.

"I feel like I was standing before a judge and he said, 'You're not guilty. You can go free,'" Executive Director Dr. Jim O'Connor said. "This is incredible for us."

Borgess Health Alliance announced in July it could no longer afford to provide free rent at 124 N. Elm St. and was hiking the rent for St. Luke's to \$1,500 a month. The Kalamazoo-based hospital delayed the increase until January.

The Weatherwax Foundation stepped forward with \$9,000 to cover the first six months' rent. The second \$9,000 came from six local Knights of Columbus councils.

The nonprofit also received a \$5,000 one-time grant for lab work from the Robert D. Craft Family Fund, administered by the Jackson County Community Foundation.

Still, O'Connor said the clinic isn't in the clear. With a 2006 budget of \$96,000, St. Luke's expects more than \$125,000 in expenses this year.

And the clientele keeps growing. More than 2,000 people receive free prescriptions from the center each month. O'Connor said St. Luke's has outgrown its 1,200-square-foot digs and needs to expand clinic hours.

"We need to get over this hump," he said. "But what we really need to get our own building so we can be masters of our own fate."

The goal is to buy a more than 5,000-square-foot building owned by Borgess on Homewild Avenue. The asking price is \$250,000, but hospital spokesman Michael Alfred said "close negotiations" are taking place.

O'Connor said the clinic could "optimistically" move in April 1.

To get there, St. Luke's will need another wave of generosity. So, the clinic is planning a Daytona 500-themed fundraiser Feb. 18 with the goal of raising \$40,000.

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Michigan's Uninsured ... 1.1M, 800K or 200K?

MIRS, January 23, 2007

When discussing health care in Michigan, Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** and her administration typically claims 1.1 million residents are uninsured. But based on the findings of her own report, the governor's claim overstates the actual number by more than 27 percent.

Naturally, the number the Governor cites gets repeated and bandied about. As recently as Monday, the 1.1 million figure was cited by Rep. Kathy **ANGERER** (D-Dundee) during the new House majority press conference.

Some who have looked closer at the issue claim the 800,000 actually overstates the problem, as well. When factors such as eligibility for government programs, temporary loss of insurance and those who just plain decide not to buy insurance are taken into account, the real uninsured problem in Michigan, they claim, is actually in the neighborhood of 200,000.

"Is there a problem concerning people who don't have health insurance in the states? Yes, there is," Rep. Bruce **CASWELL** (R-Hillsdale) told *MIRS*. "But it's not at the level that the administration makes it sound like is."

Granholtz commissioned the State Planning Project (SPP) For the Uninsured, to study the problem of Michigan citizens who don't have health insurance. It released its household survey report last August. According to the report, roughly 800,000 Michigan residents lacked health insurance. This number contrasted with the 2004-2005 Current Population Survey (CPS) estimate, which estimated the number of uninsured in the state at about 1.1 million.

But the Governor and her administration continue to use the 1.1 million figure from the CPS report, even though the SPP is based on a much larger sample size. Why?

"The director (Janet **OLSZEWSKI** of the Department of Community Health) is more comfortable with the CPS," DCH Spokesman T.J. **BUCHOLZ** said. "It's a national study and it's more consistent with what we need to have when we're doing things like filing for federal waivers."

According to Page 5 of the 113-page SSP report Granholtz commissioned, the difference between her report and the CPS report her administration continues to quote "follows a pattern" in which state surveys find lower uninsured rates than the CPS national surveys find.

An additional reason to believe the report Granholtz commissioned is likely to be more accurate is because it is based on a much larger sample size. The sample size was 34,113 in the Governor's survey and just 5,908 in the CPS survey.

Bucholz said the CPS study fits in better for the Department's purposes, because it is a "snapshot" survey taken at approximately the same time each year. He said the SSP report Granholtz commissioned was a "one-time" study taken over an entire year.

"We think the snapshot is more appropriate," Bucholz said.

Another view of the differences between the two reports comes when the numbers are broken down in terms of percentages. The Granholm report, which is the one the administration doesn't quote, claims the percentage of Michigan residents without health insurance is 7.8 percent. Meanwhile, the CPS report the administration favors has it at 11.6 percent

The uninsured rate among those aged 18-64 is only 10.9 percent, according to the Granholm-commissioned report. This is well below the 15.8 percent the CPS claims are uninsured between these ages.

Then there's the issue of breaking down the 800,000 figure from the SPP.

Caswell, who chaired the House Appropriations Subcommittees on Community Health when the GOP controlled the House, pointed out a paragraph on page six of the Governor's report that states that of the 800,000 uninsured, approximately 100,000 are children.

"But about 50 percent of those kids qualify for programs like MiCHILD that would provide health care," Caswell maintained. "That leaves about 50,000 kids not covered by health insurance. That's a problem and those kids need coverage, but on a percentage basis it shows that the state is actually doing a pretty good overall job of getting children covered."

Caswell also claims a closer look at the 700,000 adults in the state that Granholm's survey identified as adults without health insurance, shows 41 percent went without coverage for less than two years, 16.4 percent less than six months, 27.9 percent less than a year and 35 percent less than 18 months. (Taken from chart on page 18 of the study).

From Caswell's point of view, these statistics indicate that a hefty portion of uninsured adults in Michigan at any given time are changing jobs or undergoing some other temporary changes. This seems to be borne out by the other charts Caswell points to (also from page 18), which shows that 31.2 percent of those surveyed said they'd lost their insurance because of leaving their jobs, and 17.4 percent identified the reason as becoming ineligible.

Caswell argues that if Granholm is going to use the number of people in Michigan who really don't have access to health care as an argument for her health care plan, the numbers from her own plan don't indicate that the situation is nearly as dire she's making it sound.

"Then we have those who can afford it, but simply choose not buy it," Caswell said. "In addition, I don't think we know how many of these people are college students."

"I admit that there is room for honest disagreement and debate over what some of these numbers indicate," Caswell added. "But based on the numbers in the Governor's own report, I don't think it would be unreasonable to wait and see how some of these health care plans other states are trying actually work out before we start following their lead."

GROUPS WORKING TO SOLVE UNINSURED PROBLEM

A variety of groups representing health care, businesses and consumers have begun down the path to solving the problem of uninsured Michigan residents. But when that solution might come is as unanswered as what it might look like.

Rob Fowler, executive director of the Small Business Association of Michigan and president of the Michigan Health Insurance Advisory Council, said the only thing the members of the council agree on at this point is that uninsured residents are costing all of them.

“Those costs find their way back to us as paying customers,” Mr. Fowler told Gongwer News Service. And he said the problem “spirals”: higher health care costs mean higher insurance rates, leaving more people uninsured and adding to the costs others pay.

Though the group got its start as a state government effort, Mr. Fowler said the members decided to take it out of the government realm as a way to build a plan with broad support outside of politics and to keep the effort going beyond a legislative session.

“In some ways it was kind of shouldering the problem ourselves rather than waiting for a governor or a Legislature to solve for us,” he said. “We think this is a long term problem that no single governor or session of the Legislature is going to solve.”

Not trying to tie the project to a particular term of office also allows for broader discussions, he said. “We are not going to work within any predetermined time period force ourselves to solutions,” he said, though adding, “There is a sense of urgency.”

Not having a state tie also opens the group to more participants. Though the group has a set 26-member board, Mr. Fowler said anyone with a stake in the issue, including state officials, was welcome to participate in discussions.

Mr. Fowler said the good will among the group of otherwise disparate interests began with the State Planning Project for the Uninsured, a project run through the Department of Community Health under a federal grant that recently ran out.

The project did not reach a solution, but did begin discussions, he said.

“It brought a whole group of people together who couldn’t have been further apart on what the solution should be,” he said. “The way that usually ends is we all sit around and blame each other and nothing gets done. This one was different. It became apparent to everybody that the uninsured issue is our issue.”

Past efforts to fix the health care system have tried to focus on the problems of a particular group – high insurance costs for small businesses, insufficient Medicaid reimbursements for doctors and hospitals, insufficient access to care for residents – which

could not build support from the other groups. So Mr. Fowler said among the first efforts of the group will be to get a better handle on what the problem actually is.

“We need to do a finance study to understand the economics of health care in Michigan,” he said. The proposed study would look not only at the costs of health care overall, but at the costs of each step of the delivery and payment process to determine where there might be improvements.

The point of the study is also to develop a proposal that is Michigan-specific, not one based on programs in other states, Mr. Fowler said. He said the new law in Massachusetts provided a model for discussions, though not necessarily a model for a final product.

“Can there be a solution that’s uniquely Michigan that comes from stakeholders?” he said.

But the group is still a little ways from even beginning the study. The organizational meeting was last Wednesday and will meet again March 5 to begin actual discussions.

The group will also be looking for money for its plans. He said it so far has about \$20,000 kicked in by some of the member groups but expects to seek grants for the economics study or other efforts.

Mr. Fowler said the members also realize that any recommendations will have to come with full support of the group.

“The truth is we have no power. No one handed us the torch and said, ‘Go solve this,’” he said. “Our thought leadership is the only power we have.”

Michigan Jobless Rate Still Behind Mississippi

MIRS, January 22, 2007

Michigan's 7.1 percent unemployment rate in December was still the nation's second-highest rate and Michigan was the only state in the nation to see an employment drop off from December 2005 to December 2006.

But the statistics released today by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) had a glimmer of good news for the Great Lake state. Michigan ranked fourth in the country for largest employment gains with 14,900, putting it behind only Florida (18,800), California (17,200) and Texas (15,600).

Mississippi reported the highest unemployment rate in December at 7.5 percent, followed by Michigan. Alaska was at 6.7 percent and South Carolina 6.6 percent. The District of Columbia registered a jobless rate of 6.3 percent. Hawaii and Utah again recorded the lowest rates, 2.0 and 2.6 percent, respectively. Nine other states had rates below 3.5 percent, the BLS reported.

Minnesota registered the largest statistically significant over-the-month unemployment rate increase, .3 percentage points. Kansas and Nevada had increases of .2 percentage points. But Michigan was the only state to lose jobs over the last 12 months with 19,800 jobs lost representing a half a percent. The largest employment increase came in Texas with 213,200 jobs gained.

However, Michigan's rise in employment was among the four the BLS reported as being "statistically significant."

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Article published Jan 24, 2007

Michigan Works works

Rina Benden

For The Enquirer

ALBION — Will Slone knows what it feels like to lose your job.

"I had 27 years at Harvard Industries when it closed. It's pretty traumatic," Slone said.

Slone thought a plan was in place with a new buyer, but the business quickly closed and took 500 jobs with it.

That was four-and-a-half years ago. Today, the former metal pattern maker is a coordinator for Human Resource Development Inc. for Branch and Calhoun counties, one of numerous services offered under the Michigan Works umbrella at its new Albion facility.

Slone's experience has been shared by an increasing number of Michigan workers who learned that their jobs were being eliminated in 2006. When all was said and done, the unemployment rate burgeoned above 6 percent in Calhoun and Jackson counties — compared to an average of 4 percent a decade ago, according to the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

Those developments sent Michigan Works into high gear. It moved its operation to a renovated facility on Albion's west side to better accommodate its many services, including a talent bank, self-serve resources room, counseling and job-search services.

When someone applies for unemployment benefits, they're told to call "MARVIN," an automated voice response network, to arrange a time to register with Michigan Works.

In Albion, the first person that clients will meet is help-room specialist Pamela Newman, who guides them through the initial process.

"They'll put some information on the computer and put their resume in the Michigan Talent Bank," Newman explained. "This is a condition of drawing unemployment. It's not difficult. They can also update their resume from home or another location. And on that same Web site is a list of jobs they can search."

For those who aren't comfortable with computers, Michigan Works maintains a hard-copy book of job listings at its Albion location.

"I update that book weekly," Newman said. "The talent bank is updated daily."

On a recent Friday morning, most seats were taken at the agency's computer terminals. One of them was occupied by Amber Bagi, 27, of Springport. The mother of three said she is working on her General Equivalency Diploma through Work First.

"You do it on the computer until you know it, then you take your test," Bagi said. "It's on your own time, and there's different sections. There's 800 little mastery tests that you complete."

Bagi said after she finishes her GED, she wants to take a certified nursing assistant class.

"I asked my caseworker to refer me because it's the best option," she said. "It pays for everything you want to do, if you want to make yourself better in life."

Heather McCune is a Work First employment counselor.

"I get referrals from the Department of Human Services, Family Independence Agency and Friend of the Court. They're required to come into my program," McCune explained.

"They come to a Monday orientation, and the first week is called Job Club, which is a class about job-skills training, resumes, and team-building skills. After that, they start their job search."

McCune, who's been with the agency for 11 years, said clients are offered several incentives to help get them into the job market.

"We can pay for them to get their GED," she said. "We have two vans that transport people back and forth to work for 90 days or to do job

search. We pick them up at home. Occasionally, we can extend that time a little if someone gets a job and they don't have a driver's license, or they're working on getting their license back and paying off their tickets.

"We can pay up to \$1,200 toward the purchase of a vehicle, whether they want to use it as a down payment or just find a car that's \$1,200. They have to be working 30 days before we can do the car purchase paperwork," McCune added.

Work First also pays for child care, if the client is receiving assistance from the state.

Although the job market is tough, McCune says there are success stories.

"You can definitely see the change in their attitude," she said. "It helps the whole family because there's not all that pressure. They know they're making it on their own, and that's our major goal: self-sufficiency."

Also housed at the new Albion site is Michigan Rehabilitation Services, which helps individuals with disabilities find employment.

There are also services directed toward military veterans.

And there's a class in money management, conducted by Guardian, Inc.

Meanwhile, Slone is chipping away at the roster of displaced workers in the region. His agency played a major role in directing employees to Continental Carbonic Products, Inc., which recently opened near Albion.

We have been able to help place people there, including management, supervisors, production and maintenance. I think we've written between 25 and 30 on-the-job contracts," he said.

"People in my program want to find a job. They're motivated," he added. "My agency also has funding for classroom training. We can offer up to two years, fully funded."

Among the programs that may qualify for federal funding are electrician, nursing, administrative assistant, graphic design, pipefitting and millwright training.

"The most important thing is to help people pick up the pieces and start over," he said.

Rina Benden is a freelance reporter. She can be reached at rinamill@cablespeed.com.

www.record-eagle.com

01/23/2007

Pair face prison if restitution isn't paid

BY VICTOR SKINNER

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TRAVERSE CITY — They scammed nearly \$900,000 from area senior citizens in a so-called "Ponzi" scheme and had almost a year to repay their victims.

But Gary Singer and Margaret Zimmerman, former principals in Grand Traverse County-based Estate Growth Management, so far have repaid only a fraction of the looted funds.

They face a court hearing next month that could result in lengthy prison terms for both.

Singer, 55, and Zimmerman, 49, are due back in court Feb. 16, 11 months after 13th Circuit Court Judge Philip Rodgers delayed sentencing on their felony convictions. They are obligated to pay \$860,000 restitution, and authorities warned they'll seek serious penalties if they haven't done so by then.

By late last week, Zimmerman had paid \$5,050 and Singer, \$2,850. Estate Growth Management made one payment of \$203,095 in June, court records show.

"They are all bound to the total amount. If Estate Growth is now defunct and does not pay its portion of the restitution, the burden still falls upon Zimmerman and Singer to pay back the full amount," said Matt Frendewey, a spokesman for the state attorney general's office.

"We will ask and we will push for serious prison time if they show up Feb. 16 without the full restitution paid," Frendewey said.

Several local residents who were victimized by the pair declined to comment on the upcoming hearing.

Zimmerman awaits sentencing on one count of false pretenses over \$20,000 and another count of embezzling from a vulnerable adult over \$20,000.

Singer faces two counts of false pretenses over \$20,000. Both could be sentenced to up to 10 years in prison. Estate Growth Management was convicted of embezzling from a vulnerable adult over \$20,000 and uttering and publishing.

Zimmerman and Singer currently are on probation and cannot leave the state, according to the Department

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of Corrections Web site.

As part of the plea agreement, and if restitution was paid, the felony counts against Singer and Zimmerman would be replaced with one five-year sentence each, which likely would result in some jail time and probation, Frendewey said.

Through Estate Growth Management, Zimmerman and Singer convinced 14 victims in Grand Traverse, Benzie, Leelanau, Cheboygan, Charlevoix and Manistee counties to invest about \$1 million in California-based companies that used the money to pay other investors.

Several others were investigated in the scheme, including area resident Johnathon Brzezinski, who in March was sentenced to 24 to 60 months in prison.

Their looming convictions have made it difficult for Singer and Zimmerman to repay their victims, but they have paid off more than the commissions they made from the scam, said Gerald Chefalo, attorney for Estate Growth Management and Gary Singer.

"It is just a daunting and monumental restitution," Chefalo said. "Maggie has been working two jobs and Gary has started his own company to pay back their restitution. They are not working in the financial industry, plus they have the convictions on their record so it's challenging to make the payments."

Chefalo contends that sending Singer and Zimmerman to prison wouldn't be in the victims' best interests.

"I am just wondering how much restitution gets paid off when someone is in prison. I think none," he said. "They are guaranteeing their victims no money if they ask for a prison sentence."

Margaret Zimmerman declined comment last week.

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Budget-Cutting Eyes Looking At DOC

MIRS, January 23, 2007

Key lawmakers are sending signals that the Department of Corrections' (DOC) \$1.85 billion budget may be ripe for cuts, if not this year as part of a solution to the \$800 million hole in the current Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budget, than for next year's FY 2008 spending plan.

What exactly that restructuring will look like — revamped sentencing guidelines, releasing prisoners — is still up in the air. But Senate Majority Leader Mike **BISHOP** (R-Rochester) confirmed today at the Lansing Economic Club luncheon that state officials have been re-evaluating sentencing guidelines as a way to reduce corrections costs and overcrowding.

"We have been focused on the punitive side of corrections for a number of years. In the process, we've forgotten about the rehabilitation side. And, in many cases, by incarcerating as many people as we have and by going with some of the mandatory guidelines in sentencing, we've put ourselves in an awful position.

"As time goes on, we will re-evaluate those sentencing guidelines."

Meanwhile, sources in the House tell *MIRS* much talk has been given to looking at the DOC as a prime target for budget cutting. Whether lawmakers are serious about releasing more prisoners or more interested in using the threat as a way to scare the public into tax increases is yet to be seen. However, there's no question more attention will be given to why Michigan locks up the numbers of people it does.

According to the House Fiscal Agency, four areas of the state budget soaks 86 percent of the General Fund — community health (31.9 percent, \$2.9 billion), higher education (21.2 percent, \$1.95 billion), corrections (20.2 percent, \$1.858 billion) and human services (13 percent, \$1.2 billion).

State prisons are packed to the gills, incarceration rates are at an all-time high and Michigan is ranked 11th in the country for state incarceration levels, according to *Associated Press* reports. Missouri is the only other state in the Great Lakes region that has a higher incarceration rate than the regional average.

Michigan also stands out because it's one of only three non-southern states that has such a high incarceration rate.

"If we had incarceration rates similar to other states we would be talking about a \$500 million a year in savings," said DOC Spokesman Russ **MARLAN**.

Marlan said high incarceration rates, a higher number of parole violators and strict sentencing guidelines play a role in the large number of inmates locked up in the state's prisons, which sucks up state dollars.

The Patrick **SELEPAK** incident, in which Selepak's mistaken parole turned into a three-person killing spree brought back a large number of parole violators that weren't in jail.

"We're quite confident this had something to do with it," Marlan said about the increased impact this had on incarceration levels.

Marlan said the state can also look at sentencing guidelines. Apparently, Michigan has a unique system where criminals are evaluated according to the crime they committed and their criminal history. Based on this system, some go to prison and others are released.

The problem is, there's a gray area where the judge can decide to do either or. When the system was implemented the DOC thought 20 percent of those who fell in the gray area would end up in prison. However, 40 percent of those who end up in the gray area go to jail.

"That's impacted our prison population as well," Marlan said.



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GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR



News Release

Contact: Maureen Sorbet or Karen Stock (517) 373-7394

2007 Heart Gallery Exhibit Helps Find Adoptive Families for Kids *Grand Opening Held January 24 at the Capitol Rotunda*

January 24, 2007

"What I want for myself in this life is a family"

The statement above was made by 16 year-old Danielle, who is waiting to be adopted. Many of us take being part of a family for granted. A family provides the simplest comforts like having someone who cares where you are and asks, "how was your day?"

Today, in Michigan, there are more than 4,000 children without families. These children wait and hope every day for someone to adopt them, and give them families of their own. Most of these children are not newborns or infants, but older children, many who live with the trauma of abuse and neglect, have medical issues or need special help.

Some of the children waiting to be adopted are featured in a heart-warming photographic exhibit called the Michigan Heart Gallery. The 2007 Michigan Heart Gallery exhibit was unveiled to the public today in the Michigan State Capitol Rotunda. The celebration featured a multi-media presentation and speakers, including, State Senator Mark Schauer, DHS Director Marianne Udow and several other state and local dignitaries.

The Michigan Heart Gallery, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network and the Michigan Department of Human Services seeks to bring our community closer to the faces and voices of children waiting for permanent homes. The Michigan Heart Gallery features professional photos of Michigan's waiting children, who come from various regions of the state. Recruitment activities such as the Heart Gallery remind people that there are many children in Michigan who are waiting to be adopted.

The photographs in the Heart Gallery were taken by dozens of professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system.

“Most of the children featured in the Heart Gallery have been waiting for a long time to find a family of their own,” Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, said. “While we hope the children featured in the exhibit will find families, the larger goal of the Heart Gallery is to promote the idea of caring for and adopting children from the foster care system. We know from experience that if these children are not seen, and if we do not continue to educate the public about older children, who need families, then they are forgotten. The Heart Gallery is an amazing undertaking and we are thrilled the public will have an opportunity to view these portraits, get to know the children and possibly take action to see if adoption may be right for them.”

These waiting children have simple requests, “I would like to live with a nice family that would let me play on the football team,” explains one boy. “My best thoughts about getting a family is that I hope they are nice,” shares another.

Some of the children in the Michigan Heart Gallery have been waiting to be adopted for several years and are now teenagers. Children who aren't adopted by the age of 18 are released into the world, to do the best they can. Approximately 450 Michigan children, between the ages of 18 – 21, transition out of the foster care system annually. These youths do not have a family to stand up at their wedding, a place to go home to for the holidays or a family safety net of any kind. The Michigan Heart Gallery endeavors to inspire prospective parents to adopt an older child, so these children will have a vital connection to a supportive adult during adolescence, as young adults and beyond.

The Heart Gallery concept was initially founded by the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department in 2001 as a way to help foster children in protective custody who are waiting for adoptive families find the families they desire. Since 2001, the Heart Gallery has expanded to other states and cities.

Later today, the 2007 Michigan Heart Gallery exhibit leaves the Capitol and travels to Lansing Community College, where it can be viewed from January 24 through February 4 before moving to the next site, the Rivertown Crossings Mall in Grand Rapids.

2007 Exhibit Travel Schedule

January 24	Lansing, Capital Rotunda
Jan 24 – Feb 3	Lansing, LCC-West
Feb 6 –26	Grand Rapids, Rivertown Crossings Mall
March 1-29	Escanaba, Bonifas Arts Center
April 20 – May 11	Traverse City, NMU Library
May 12	Traverse City, Festival of Tables
May 22 – June 5	Detroit, African American Museum
June 6 – 28	Alpena , Art in the Loft – Gallery 109
August 12 – Sept. 4	Ann Arbor, Briarwood Mall
September 5 – 21	Ypsilanti, Ypsilanti Library

Sept 22 – Oct. 15	Frankenmuth, Bavarian Inn Lodge
Nov. 2	Kalamazoo, Park Trades Center – Art Hop

Dates are still available. Calendar in progress.

A current exhibit schedule, along with portraits of children waiting to be adopted, can be found on the Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at www.miheart.org.